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Hansen, Carsten Jahn; Harder, Henrik; Sørensen, Michael Tophøj

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Rethinking and Rebuilding Urban Development

New Challenges and Directions for Urban Research and Practice

Carsten Jahn Hansen

Department of Planning, Aalborg University

Henrik Harder

Department of Architecture, Design and Media Technology, Aalborg University

Michael Tophøj Sørensen

Department of Planning, Aalborg University

Introduction to the issue

The overall aim of this issue is to present some of the most recent examples of how researchers and practitioners may perceive and work with development, planning and design of urban areas and regions. It is the intention to identify and understand key challenges to such activities as well as to contribute to discuss potential future directions. In particular, the issue attempts to contribute to understand aspects related to the following basic traits of urban development and transformation, such as it occurs in western societies and primarily with a focus on Danish cases:

- increasing urban complexity and (apparently) a more multi-layered urban landscape
- fragmenting and differentiating cities, however also regenerating and renewing cities
- new patterns, flows and modes of everyday life and of cultures and practices in the city
- new modes of spatial development and new policies, strategies, plans and designs
- new patterns, networks and processes of urban decision-making, governance and planning

The issue provides varied focal points and examples on how such aspects may be perceived and articulated. However, common to all articles is the attempt to reflect on: *'what seems to be new and essential in urban transformation and development, and, based on that, what may be suggested as future topics and objectives for urban research and/or practice?'*

It can safely be regarded as a general assumption and motivation behind the articles that western urban development is considered to be in a transition phase characterised mainly by post-industrial development tendencies and rapid socio-technological change. This raises many questions concerning the nature and consequences of these changes, e.g. the changed configuration and use of urban localities, spaces and infrastructures as well as the changes in perceptions on what it means to live in urban areas. Moreover, it challenges fundamental settings and processes on how to generate resources and how to decide and interact on those changes – between public and private actors, and in particular in relation to the users of urban areas. Such questions and challenges are expanded upon through the articles of this issue.

The initial background for organising this issue has been the merging of two Danish research institutions: Aalborg University (AAU) and the Danish National Building Institute (SBI). Together, these institutions have formed 'Build', <http://www.build.aau.dk/>, a centre comprised of approximately 300 researchers covering a wide range of topics and disciplines related to urban, regional, rural, building and housing development. This issue originates in activities with the specific aim to create urban research oriented synergies across several research environments within and in relation to this centre.

Main themes and challenges

The articles of this issue are covering a range of more specific urban research aspects, and in each their way they can be claimed to shed light on key challenges of contemporary urban development. However, looking across the articles, some general themes, focal points and/or challenges seem to emerge and intersect, and in several ways the articles mutually reinforce each other in those regards.

Mobility and transportation aspects are seen as a central theme of urban living and functionality in several articles in this issue, mainly in Jensen & Lassen, Jørgensen et al., Jensen & Morelli and Andrade et al., but also to a limited extent in Jensen et al. (all in this issue). 'Mobilities are partly seen as constitutive for the structures that frame social life, and it is within these mobilities that cultural patterns, actions, and identities are produced and reproduced. But, at the same time, social structures of different kinds (e.g. economic, political and spatial) are seen as constitutive for the ways in which mobilities develop.' (Jensen & Lassen) Hence, mobility aspects are deeply intertwined with the creation and development of urban identities, communities and belonging (e.g. Jørgensen et al.), be it individual personal identities as well as collective identities that ultimately contribute in shaping urban cultures. And, it (therefore) matters, to a great extent, how we understand and organise urban systems and infrastructures for mobility, physical as well as virtual. Even in specific and concrete cases of establishing, for instance, better conditions for bicycling (e.g. Andrade et al.) it becomes evident how the seemingly simple activity of using bicycle lanes is related not only to the actual physical design of bicycle lanes but also to socio-demographics and consequentially to the broader needs and aspirations of bicycle users. Urban mobilities both shape and depict urban living and development.

This hints at another important theme that seems to emerge from the articles in this issue – that there is a need for a stronger *user-orientation* in urban research focuses and more *inclusion* in urban development practices (more on the latter below). This becomes clear in most of the articles, but especially in Laursen & Andersson, Larsen & Engberg and Andrade et al., while it is also an important implication of the discussions in Jørgensen et al., Jensen & Morelli, Jensen & Lassen and Jensen et al. In particular, understanding urban living requires data and insight that is difficult to come across through statistics and basic geographical data only. The behaviour and choices of urban dwellers are influenced by such a complex variety of factors, and through all sorts of scales, so that attempts to categorise them often tend to become futile when based in previously settled views and top-down fashions. In stead it seems to be richly demonstrated throughout this issue that increased attention to the *users or consumers of urban areas* will enable a better-qualified understanding of the most recent changes and development potentials in the area. User perspectives seem to be particularly relevant for attempts to understand and deal with

the sense of belonging, the identity, the collective knowledge structures, etc. related to local areas and communities. In addition, user perspectives are simply unavoidable if one wants to perceive often-incomprehensible mobility activities and urban networks. Here, a user-orientation also offers a strong potential to identify reasoning and explanation behind actual physical patterns of behaviour and choice, use of various urban technologies, etc.

As such, a user focus would also be helpful in debating what turns out to be an underlying *normative* dimension in most of the articles – that of the *sustainability* of urban living as well as *the role of cities*. It is interesting to notice the nature of the widespread underlying, sometimes implicit, attention all the authors are giving to help create the basis for a *safer, sounder, richer, more meaningful, more democratic, etc. urban life* – whether they look at larger urban areas or villages in outskirts areas. Here, the usual parameters of economic, social and environmental sustainability are all dealt with, expanded upon and in many ways combined throughout this issue. It leads to interesting conclusions related to, for instance, the apparently questionable sustainability of the compact city movement when reviewed through the lenses of a mixture of several environmental and socio-cultural parameters (see Jensen et al.). This is used to point towards a need for less one-dimensional and more interdisciplinary views as well as the above-mentioned user and consumer orientation in urban research.

We also find attempts to describe and understand the apparent abolition, over the last 2-3 decades, of equality as a core normative concern – and how it has been replaced with increased attention to a more differentiated development that focuses on local potentials and opportunities for growth and a better quality of life. This is clearly visible in Nørgaard's and in Laursen & Andersson's contributions. And from two very different viewpoints, a system approach and regional focus in Nørgaard and a bottom-up and village focus in Laursen & Andersson, they also bring into attention discussions of the role of cities, particularly *centralisation* tendencies versus the challenge of urban living in fringe areas.

Those tendencies and concerns also bring about discussions on another theme that is apparent in most of the articles – the *coordination challenges* in catering for, planning and managing urban development. Across the articles, the political dimension and issues of collective decision-making seem to be regarded as essential and decisive to the success of urban change. However, it is not through the use of traditional top-down policies, strategies and plans that the authors of this issue seem to call for action. In fact, it seems to be questioned in various manners whether such activities are sufficiently meaningful and efficient and sometimes whether they work at all. Nørgaard review changes in the Danish government structure and in the spatial planning system and finds a lack of coordination and cohesion when attention is turned towards specific projects. In particular, Nørgaard identifies a potential mismatch between different policies, reforms and strategies in relation to challenges of rural and peripheral areas in Denmark.

Larsen & Engberg brings into attention how coordination challenges is also an important theme internally in local government organisations. They identify a need for more learning-oriented and adhocracy-like organisations that 'allow their members space for reflexivity and responsiveness towards new impulses from exogenous network partners. Sustainable innovation in urban regeneration planning and policy requires *inclusion* and *acceptance of contextual and situated*

knowledge.' (Larsen & Engberg) This again supports the previously mentioned attention to user-orientation, and it shows the importance of rethinking local authorities, so that planners are allowed a greater opportunity to 'perform sense-making' from situation to situation, and to adjust accordingly. Hence, user-orientation has consequences not only in relation to the users of urban areas, but also to the professional users of political-administrative systems.

The coordination challenges mentioned above seems to provoke at least two supplementary and potentially contradictory lines of questioning. One is the question whether overall spatial development policies and strategies (and their agencies) are sufficiently open to enable settings that learn from and adjust to local circumstances and initiatives? Are they readily prepared for processes of inclusion and for partly being instruments in identifying yet unknown resources and useful local knowledge, e.g. to bring into play the users of urban areas? And, given an increased attention to inclusion, another question seems to be whether policies, strategies, plans and projects will be sufficiently coordinated between them? Will an increased focus on situation-specific circumstances create an incomprehensible and incoherent patchwork of individual projects and initiatives that ultimately defies coordination and the power to effectively influence larger development processes (e.g. regional development in outskirts areas, or climate change issues)? As such, the issue of user-orientation and inclusion contains both promising aspects (e.g. in terms of local democracy and the generation of relevant knowledge and resources) and potentially counter-productive aspects, which together challenges meaningful and efficient coordination.

Finally, the themes above indicate methodological focal points and challenges – both in terms of the way in which urban research is performed, the way in which knowledge is created and used, and the way in which strategies, plans and projects are produced and implemented. In general, the articles of this issue seem to subscribe to post-positivist viewpoints and approaches, for instance in the sense that much attention is given to relational and context-dependent aspects and values. Attempts at generalisation is mostly reserved for describing a few overall and historic tendencies, whereas most of the attention of the authors is turned towards showing how meaningful knowledge and methods must necessarily be created 'in situ'.

In urban development and planning practices this implies the need for a continued focus on, and evolution of, deliberation, interaction and participation, such as demonstrated in the inclusive strategies and methods in Laursen & Andersson. Moreover, it seems to imply the usefulness of temporariness and place-based learning, however with the important corrective that one should keep in mind that flexible, (de)liberated, and situation-based planning also brings about new complexities concerning coordination challenges.

The articles

Together, the articles of this issue span from urban sociology and geography to political science and management-oriented approaches. In various ways, borders between these disciplines are crossed and intersect in each of the articles in order to search for potential new insights. The main organising principle of the issue is to begin with trying to understand changes in some of the fundamental aspects of everyday life in urban areas and regions. What goes on inside and in relation to urban areas, in particular on the human scale, and how may we perceive contemporary

developments? Increasingly, the issue then deals with examples of actual change processes on various scales, and the issue end up with having provided accounts and discussions on how we may work together in the rethinking and rebuilding of urban development, policy and planning.

In the first article, Jensen & Lassen takes point of departure in the challenges to understand the importance of contemporary mobility in urban living. They present the contours of a theoretical perspective meeting the challenges to research urban mobilities. In particular, the article discusses 1) the physical city, its infrastructures and technological hardware/software, 2) policies and planning strategies for urban mobility and 3) the lived everyday life in the city and the region. They argue how new infrastructures and technologies are related to production of meaning. It functions as a 'logic of actions' and creates new arenas and tools for identity construction and social interaction. Understanding the 'meaning of movement' to the urban and regional populations reaches deep into notions of self and other, identity and culture. It is concluded that in order to understand how local neighbourhoods influence everyday life and the possibility of local communities we have to examine the multiple and complex ways that material and symbolic dimensions of neighbourhoods interact. One of the avenues of doing this is by researching how locality and local relations are shaped by mobility.

Jørgensen, Fallow & Knudsen adds to the 'mobility turn' in urban sociology by looking into theoretical questions and methodological implications concerning the relations between local community, mobility and belonging. The authors hold that the character of local communities varies from neighbourhood to neighbourhood and between urban and rural areas, and that some of these variations are connected to the question of residents' mobility and to their feelings of belonging to their neighbourhood. They argue that social relations in late modern society has been lifted from a local geographical context and restructured in a global context, because individuals' attachment to geographical place has been eroded. In addition, they question the traditional assumptions connected to socio-economic segregation labelling the marginalised groups as contained in local neighbourhoods, while ascribing freedom and reflexivity exclusively to the middle and upper classes. It is shown that 'investigations of everyday local life have to take account of both symbolic and material dimensions of local neighbourhood, mobility and local community, as well as the interplay between them. Moreover, that the politics of place and the power struggles producing and played out in localities are important for the understanding of local communities and feelings of belonging.' It is concluded that revitalizing and methodologically updating the classic Chicago school of sociology can create a productive approach to the study of local community, mobility and belonging, e.g. to illuminate different ways of being connected to place, different kinds of local communities, and how these vary with different mobility parameters.

In the next article Jensen & Morelli explores how layered urban networks of physical movement, service information, goods delivery, commercial communication etc. are connected (and disconnected). The intention is to understand how to design and intervene regardless if we are thinking about public spaces in the city, semiprivate neighbourhoods or private places. The many networks orchestrating and facilitating contemporary everyday life are dependent on the strategic sites where the networks meet and establish contact. Thus they argue for the usefulness of the notion of Critical Points of Contact (CPC) to deepen the understanding of the actual life within

networks. Thereby, it is claimed that certain points, sites and connections are more interesting (or critical) than others. A CPC is in fact a privileged observation point that allows for a view of the systems converging and interacting. This framework is quite complex and allows for different perspectives, depending on different 'points of view'. En route to this notion the authors draw upon theories within as diverse realms such as interaction design, service design, geography, and mobility studies. The article ends with concluding remarks and perspectives for further theoretical as well as empirical work in prolongation of this urban research effort. For instance that healthcare services possibly suggest a more radical redefinition of a sort of *pervasive* CPC, which does not necessarily define any specific physical place, but still adds a layer of values and significance to a well-defined geographical area (a neighbourhood), through a network of virtual access points.

In Jensen, Christensen & Gram-Hanssen our attention is shifted more towards the normative dimensions of urban development and the strategies to achieve more sustainable conditions. They review and discuss the widespread solution in urban planning to build high and compact in order to minimise the need for transportation, land use and heating. In doing so, they point towards the need to include the consumer behaviour of the household in order to understand how all the daily habits that are causing energy consumption are sustained by collective structures of knowledge, engagement, technologies etc. They find it necessary to change the analytical focus from either the material or the social/behavioural approach and instead focus on the daily practices that residents carry out in their everyday life, and which determine the level of resource consumption. This is done by means of what is termed the 'practice theory approach'. Four types of elements is identified as constituting the daily practices, such as heating, laundering and transport, which all are practices that determine the household's energy consumption and environmental impact. The four elements are: Embodied habits, knowledge/rules, engagements, and technologies (material structures). It is suggested that practice change is most successfully facilitated if initiatives address all four elements constituting and holding practices together. Finally, the authors hold that this approach necessarily has to work from below and include the citizens, as it is their daily practices that have to be challenged.

Andrade, Jensen, Harder & Madsen present some of the findings of the research project Bikeability, in which the purpose is to investigate and document relations between cycling motivation from different socio-demographic groups and distinct design characteristics related to the urban environment and the bike infrastructure. The motivation is that information on how specific design qualities enhance cycling will help decision makers to develop better and more cost-effective bike infrastructures. Results are presented from case studies of bicycle infrastructures in the Danish cities of Odense, Aarhus and Copenhagen. Here, a questionnaire has determined socio-economic characteristics of the users and effects of the infrastructure in terms of the use of bike. The users were also asked to access the infrastructure project and to describe what specific design elements that most motivate them to travel by bike. The findings highlight the critical role of fast connectivity and fast bike lanes in motivating cyclists to ride their bikes more often. It also indicates that it is challenging to ensure the perception of safety in shared-used spaces. These are findings that could be taken into consideration by architects, planners, engineers and interest organisations when debating, deciding, planning and designing bike infrastructures.

The following article by Nørgaard brings into attention the coherence and coordination between policies and development in a Danish regional context. According to Nørgaard, regional processes have transformed rural and peripheral areas throughout Europe through spatial, functional and social changes and in terms of stagnating economies as well as population decline. In response to this, the so-called 'new rural paradigm' has been developed, in which key elements are a focus on places rather than sectors and on investments rather than subsidies, stressing the need for building on local strengths and qualities. This focus is also a clear priority expressed through various official government documents and within national strategies and policies in Denmark. The article therefore discusses challenges, futures and possibilities on rural and peripheral areas in Denmark. An overall goal within the EU is to pursue economic, social and territorial cohesion and although Danish policies aim for balanced regional growth and development various reforms seem to pull in a different direction. More specifically, a range of reforms has been consolidating functions and institutions and thereby centralizing growth and development. It is concluded that Danish government reforms implemented over the past five years have eroded and undermined rather than strengthened the potential for development within rural and peripheral areas. It is also concluded that although the 'new rural paradigm' may be a necessary and useful approach to local development and change it does not adequately address problems in rural and peripheral areas - at least when it is isolated from coherent national policies and programs. The overall conclusion thus is that there is an obvious mismatch between different policies, reforms and strategies in relation to challenges of rural and peripheral areas in Denmark.

In Laursen & Andersson we are also faced with development challenges in Danish outskirt areas, however from a local level perspective. It is stated that during the last 20 years, Danish rural areas have suffered from depopulation and economic decline, and that this development seems to be accelerating. This means a negligence of buildings and infrastructure and hence a decay in architectonic and spatial qualities. A general schism observed in the discussion about Danish rural development seems to be that the main focus is kept on a national and regional level. The consequence is a lack of nuances in the overall debate and a missing ability to create positive developments, locally. Instead, they call for an increased focus on the quality of life rather than size and growth. Through studies of the village of Klokkeholm, the authors investigate how potentials of a 'landscape urbanism'-based development and the commitment from the local community in participative projects can create differentiated development in an area of decline. In doing so it is regarded to be important to incorporate social, economic, historical and cultural aspects as well as ecological and natural processes – and hence to diagnose the urban and use the local conditions as a point of departure in future interventions. This also implies an extensive involvement of local citizens in order to expand the users' view of their own context and to set up a range of hypotheses regarding a possible future – a new design based narrative. In conclusion, they claim that by setting up the right process, pockets of growth can be developed in declining areas. They propose a strategy using landscape and citizen driven 'dynamos' as triggers for a development, which aims to improve everyday life by creating new landscape-based spaces.

In the final article of this issue Larsen & Engberg discusses the usefulness of aspects of organisational learning and knowledge management to urban regeneration planning. They argue that place-based urban policy interventions have added new and innovative solutions to increasingly complex and intertwined economic, social, and physical planning problems in urban

locations. Whereas these approaches in the first place were initiated top-down, they eventually result in the cultivation and production of new local knowledge of planning needs and on-site experiences with implementation of planning. Thereby, new knowledge is brought into the open, and it confronts existing local government planning as well as the traditional bureaucracy's division of labour between specialised sections. Thus, long-term, sustainable implementation of innovative models of municipal public service provision is paradoxically often hindered by organisational inertia, inflexibility and lack of organisational dynamics in the local government organisation itself. At the core of this challenge is lack of communication and knowledge-sharing between departments and teams, lack of co-ordination and collaboration across administrative boundaries, rivalry between departments, etc. The authors find it remarkable that despite 10-20 years of experimentation with new policy instruments and governance models such as the Danish Kvarterloft-programmes the municipal planning organisation is left pretty much unchanged. In order to shed new light on the challenges confronting local government, the authors then point towards the usefulness of theories of organisational learning and knowledge management. For the municipal organisation to develop its capability to make use of new knowledge and the momentum created by integrated, place-based urban activities, it needs to implement some of the characteristics of a learning organisation. This includes accepting less formalisation and a more organic structure that relies on mutual adjustment as the key coordinating mechanism within and between project teams.